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And They Were There: Reports of Meetings

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ATG encourages reports on meetings. Please contact Sever Bordeianu if you are interested in reporting on a meeting or in suggesting a meeting for review by ATG! — KS

1994 IFLA Conference

Report by **Dora Biblarz**
(Arizona State University)

The 1994 IFLA Conference in Havana, Cuba presented delegates with some interesting circumstances — although nothing to match the (now legendary) Moscow meeting in 1991. The fact of the U.S. embargo, which makes it illegal to spend U.S. dollars without permission from the Treasury Department, clashed immediately with the reality that this is precisely the official currency in Cuba today. Dollars are valued because they are used to buy all the energy and goods desperately needed.

Driving or walking along the Malecon (the walk next to the bay and beach) towards Old Havana, two important sights stand out: one is the tower of the electrical generating plant, spewing a plume of heavy black smoke on top of a live flame; the other is the clumps of people watching as their countrymen get on anything that floats to take off for the U.S. territorial limits while they are able to.

I was struck by the importance of energy throughout the week: Cubans are among the most fit people I have ever seen, since they walk or bicycle everywhere they go. Taxis are very expensive and buses come in two categories: the

And They Were There

Reports of Meetings

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ones that Cubans take run limited routes and times, have few seats, and some are even made from semi-trucks pulling huge trailers that carry up to 300 people; the ones reserved for tourists look just like air-conditioned tour buses anywhere else.

One evening, before the official start of the conference, I had dinner at the restaurant in the **Inglaterra Hotel** in Old Havana with 7-8 others. Before he served our entree, the waiter ceremoniously placed candles at all the tables in the small room (two others were occupied) and turned off the lights. He lit the two candles at our table, which seemed like a charming touch. At the end of the meal, as we were getting ready to leave, he blew out the candles and handed one to me and one to another woman at the table. Rather perplexed, but feeling it

tural events and receptions, many of us assumed it meant that there would be regular shuttle service at certain intervals during the day, much like our ALA conferences. When we asked our guides (who always accompanied the buses) about this, they looked horrified! They replied that there was but one scheduled trip in the morning, a return in the evening (unless they took us directly to the reception, etc.) and if we wished to go at other times we could take taxis! It wasn't long before I realized this was a direct result of the energy crisis, and we were really fortunate to have any trips included at all!

Taxis were plentiful, and if an official taxi with a meter could not be found, there were plenty of private automobiles that were being driven by regular folks willing to knock off a dollar or two from the official rate. The dollars they earned this way paid for the expensive gas and also allowed them to buy food and other basics for their

families in the black market. They could make more money this way in a week than they could by working all year for Cuban money!

One driver spoke perfect English, and we got into a conversation about how he came to be driving a "cab" like this. He said he had been a college professor and tried to supplement his income with dollars by working in tourism several years ago. Unfortunately, that was during the time that it was illegal to earn or possess dollars and he was jailed and lost his job as a result. Ironically, today, it has official government support!

It was not unusual to meet highly educated Cubans unable to find a job in their own field and having to sell travel insurance or drive a taxi or a bus. The lucky ones are able to earn tips from tourists to supplement their meager wages (as far as I could tell, all the delegates, regardless of country, were using U.S. dollars).

Because of the paper and ink shortage (in addition to the lack of energy for

"Cintio Vitier's main message [was] that poetry — creativity — should be the center of world society."

was a compliment, we thanked him and took them with us to the theater next door (we went to see a "ballet").

After the performance, I returned to the Inglaterra with two others and we saw the same young man who had waited on us during dinner. He gave another candle to a third woman in our party. A few minutes later, we were getting ready to catch a taxi back to our hotel and he rushed up to me, explaining that he had just observed the second woman to whom he had given a candle during dinner, outside the hotel, giving her candle away! He made a point of saying that he had given it to *her* as a *gift*, not to be given away. Furthermore, he pointed out that she gave it to a fellow who worked at the hotel! He asked me to let her know he was upset about this, since I was the fluent Spanish speaker in the group and she wasn't around.

When we first arrived and were told that the buses would be transporting us back and forth from our hotels to the Congress Palace and the evening cul-

printing) there were no newspapers, books or magazines. You could find plenty of chicken, beef or pork but few fresh fruits and vegetables (couldn't be transported regularly to market). But it was at the receptions that it became quite clear that there were many food shortages for the people. As soon as the trays were brought out, the Cubans rushed for them — appetizers, main dishes, desserts, or whatever — and piled their plates high. This was not to consume themselves, as they put the majority of this food into a plastic bag to take home to their families. I felt that I could afford to buy my meals and preferred to let them take the "freebies" under the circumstances.

The Conference was very interesting and successful; this year's theme: "Libraries and Social Development" allowed ample room for participation of all types of libraries from the full range of economic conditions. At the Official Opening and Plenary Session, IFLA Presi-

dent Robert Wedgeworth noted the symbolism in coming to Cuba after last year's Conference in Barcelona — as "another voyage of discovery from the

it was for us to meet in a country which has had such "great successes in raising the general education level of its people" and "wiped out illiteracy through its own efforts and laid the basis for education and training from primary school to one of the oldest universities in the Western Hemisphere, the University of Havana, founded in 1721."

Wedgeworth also announced IFLA's exciting plans to establish IFLANET, a telecommunications network, following the close of this Conference. This will result in improved communications via email (IFLALIST) and will be followed by a document server (IFLADOC) that will make available basic information, IFLA newsletters and conference papers. I certainly look forward to this development, especially to make this important information available to a wider audience, including those who cannot come to each annual Conference.

The keynote speaker, Cintio Vitier,

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dent Robert Wedgeworth noted the symbolism in coming to Cuba after last year's Conference in Barcelona — as "another voyage of discovery from the old world to the new." He also pointed out this is the first time IFLA has met in the Latin American/Caribbean region. Wedgeworth discussed how appropriate

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is known for his poetry, fiction, and collected anthologies. His extensive work as a critic and essayist is considered among the greatest in contemporary Cuban literature. His speech was amply illustrated with poetic phrasing and contained the main message that poetry — creativity — should be the center of world society. He also noted that it seemed appropriate that the international library community is charged with the mission of working on a daily basis with the reader and the text — to bring about the destiny of humans, who invented writing and all the previous technologies — not to be slaves to their inventions, but creators or poets of their own liberty.

During a very full program of open meetings, workshops, standing committee meetings, and library visits, I found myself still able to enjoy one or two cups of Cuban coffee (delicious! like espresso) and striking up conversations with other librarians, including several Cubans who were all very friendly and quite curious to know about the problems and issues we have in common.

Although it is the section I am a member of, I can say objectively that the open session sponsored by the **Section on Acquisitions and Exchanges** was the most interesting one I attended. The overall topic was "**Social Change: Its Effects on Librarians' Abilities to Acquire Materials**"; the first paper was an excellent exposé on the "Problems Encountered in Obtaining Gray Literature" by Marie-Claire Debackere, from the French Petroleum Institute, followed

by a description of "The New Economic Situation and Its Impact on the Acquisition Policy and Methods in Russian Libraries" by Tatiana V. Ershova, from the Russian State Library in Moscow. Finally, Galina A. Kiskovskaya spoke about "The New Economic Situation and Its Impact on Foreign Acquisitions in Major Russian Libraries" focusing primarily on the **Library of Foreign Literature**, which is an international cultural center in existence for over 70 years.

Overall, this was certainly one of the best IFLA Conferences: the Congress Palace was well organized, had plenty of rooms, adequate space in the cafeteria and reasonable interpretation services (considering the budget crisis in IFLA which is causing a reduction in this area). Our Cuban hosts were very warm and everyone was as hospitable as they could be, given the economic circumstances. The social events included a lot of folk dancing and music, and we were treated to receptions in their best venues, showing us we were quite important guests. We even had access to the Internet while there, and I heard of one U.S. delegate who sent email to President Clinton, pointing out that we were attending this international conference and suggesting we normalize relations with Cuba.

It was fun to see the old American cars (alongside lots of new ones from Japan, France, Russia, etc.) but sad to see the buildings which must have been quite lovely in their day in such a state of disrepair. Window shopping was not fun at all, since there was hardly anything in the stores. The only products worth getting were cigars and rum, which I don't use, but this will not prevent me from

remembering this IFLA Conference as one of the best.

What's in a Name? — American Library Association — Report on Preservation Committee Changes

Report by Frances C. Wilkinson
(U. of New Mexico General Library)

Many people are interested in changes that have been made by ALA ALCTS in their Preservation Committees. Perhaps the most exciting news regarding preservation is that the **ALCTS Preservation of Library Materials Section (PLMS)** and the **ALCTS Reproduction of Library Materials Section (RLMS)** merged after the 1994 ALA Annual Conference to form the **ALCTS Preservation and Reformatting Section (PARS)**. The specifics of this merger were discussed at the ALCTS PLMS/RLMS Joint Reporting Session, including planning how to shift from two sections to one and how to map current committees in the two sections into one section.

New **PARS Committees** include: Education; Nominating; Reformatting; Analog and Digital; Intellectual Access; Management; Methods, Materials, and Standards: Books and Paper; Methods, Materials, and Standards: Photographic and Recording Media; Policy and Planning; and Program Planning and Publications Committees. There were no automatic transfer of Discussion Groups from the previous sections to the new one, but rather requests for Discussion Groups, via petition with a minimum of ten ALCTS member names, must be submitted. A Discussion Group will then be assigned to the standing committee that it would be most aligned with.

Although wonderfully useful information is always presented in ALA meetings and poster sessions, one of the most useful parts of ALA membership is the informal networking with colleagues working in the preservation area which takes place at meetings. After attending several meetings, you begin to recognize people and talk with them. Since there are so many levels of expertise, you can always learn from or share information with someone. The Annual ALA Conference in Chicago, IL this year will offer more informative preservation meetings, sponsored by the newly formed **ALCTS-PARS**. We are all looking forward to the new energy and focus of the reorganization! ☛

